

# Chinese Language Teaching Methodology and Technology

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Volume 3 | Issue 2

Article 3

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December 2020

## A Polite and Respectful Acceptance — Implicit Function of Refusal in Chinese from Pedagogical Perspective

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### Recommended Citation

Li, Yawei (2020) "A Polite and Respectful Acceptance — Implicit Function of Refusal in Chinese from Pedagogical Perspective," *Chinese Language Teaching Methodology and Technology*: Vol. 3 : Iss. 2 , Article 3.

Available at: <https://engagedscholarship.csuohio.edu/cltmt/vol3/iss2/3>

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## A Polite and Respectful Acceptance —— Implicit Function of Refusal in Chinese from Pedagogical Perspective

### Cover Page Footnote

I would like to show my great appreciation to Dr. Galal Walker from the Department of the East Asian Languages and Literatures at the Ohio State University, for his patient and generous academic support and constructive advice to my research. Huge thanks also go to Dr. Mari Noda who makes me see the wonderland of teaching a foreign language along with the detailed insightful feedback and to-the-point questions. I also acknowledge Dr. Xiaobin Jian, Dr. Marjorie Chan, Dr. Rebecca Bias and Dr. Michiko Hikida, for their positive comments and warm encouragement to my study, and timely help in my English academic writing. All remaining inaccuracies are mine, not theirs.

# A Polite and Respectful Acceptance

## —— Implicit Function of Refusal in Chinese from Pedagogical Perspective

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### Abstract

This paper discusses the implicit function of refusal expressions that has been used by Chinese native speakers when responding to people's offerings. By analyzing three conversations regarding how Chinese people have accepted people's offerings during different time periods (1960's, 1980's, and 2000's), the author argues that the verbal refusal in reacting to people's offerings (especially gifts) does not literally mean "No, I don't want it." Instead, it is a way to show humility, politeness, and respect to the gift giver, and it functions as an implicit form of acceptance. By referring to three excerpts chosen from *The Book of Rites (Liji 禮記)*, the author demonstrates the Chinese cultural values and cultural themes, focusing on what Chinese people say and do to show respect and politeness when dealing with gifts or other friendliness related offerings. The paper finds two pedagogical implications: 1) it is the instructor's responsibility to highlight the verbal and non-verbal behaviors that both native speakers and language learners do not ordinarily notice in language class, and 2) the repetitive contextualized performances in different levels of learning are necessary and play crucial roles in teaching and learning.

**Keywords:** culture, performance, context, accept with refusal, Chinese language pedagogy

### Introduction

Every day, people transmit information, meanings, and emotions through communication. The basic units of communication in which utterances or spates of discourse are used is called "speech acts," which are also viewed as social acts that fulfill social functions (Strauss & Feiz, 2014). Speech acts are produced and understood by people in at least three different ways. They are locutionary acts (such as uttering, stating, and saying), illocutionary acts (what it is intended to do), and perlocutionary acts (consequential effect brought about because of the speech act) (Strauss & Feiz, 2014, p. 233).

The locutionary acts are identifiable on the surface through lexicon, syntax, and literal interpretation as intending a particular type of social function. Different from locutionary acts, illocutionary acts, in most cases, are identified through a concrete context. In other words, it

indicates the communicators' intention and implies unsaid meanings through the context. Depending on how well the interlocutors interpret and react to the implied meanings from the illocutionary acts, the perlocutionary act forms, which shows the effect caused by the speech act. Speech acts that are beyond what is literally provided in the language and which are detected and understood through contexts can be identified as "implied speech acts."

Chinese language is full of implied speech acts and implied meanings. In language class, students learn how to express themselves through explicit syntax patterns or lexicon. However, in native speakers' daily lives, not all the language they use is marked explicitly with the syntax, but instead it may rely heavily on the context. If language learners cannot figure out those implied meanings, the whole communication act might not succeed. To understand the context which provides the meanings, we need to know the *culture* that creates the contexts.

Walker (2010) uses "Revealed Culture (cultural knowledge that a native is generally eager to communicate to a non-native)" (p. 14), "Ignored Culture (cultural knowledge a native is generally unaware of until the behavior of a non-native brings it to light)" (p. 14) and "Suppressed Culture (knowledge about a culture that a native is generally unwilling to communicate to a non-native)" (p. 14) as different perspectives to describe cultural exchanges. Based on Walker's point of view, Jian (2010) gives a more detailed explanation of those terms by showing different examples that Chinese language learners experienced in China. Revealed Culture is usually covered and is taught in language textbooks and classes. Although most language learners do not have the chance to use them, they already know these "rules" before they go to China. Only by experiencing the authentic language environment can they realize how complicated revealed culture is. Ignored Culture will not be written about in textbooks nor taught in class. Some Chinese speakers do think these "rules" are interesting because they do not realize that certain behaviors are part of Chinese culture until language learners point them out. Other native speakers think there is no such thing as "ignored culture," only verbal habits that are picked up by native speakers. Suppressed Culture hardly appears in language classes and has rarely shown up in language textbooks either, so those rules are seldom being performed in classroom activities and performances. Sometimes, Chinese people may feel uncomfortable or embarrassed when foreigners discuss suppressed culture in front of them since this is also described as "家丑不可外扬 (*jia chou bu ke wai yang*) or 'A family's own ugly matters should not be revealed to outsiders'" (Jian, 2010, p. 125).

Culture is abstract because it is not directly observable. Everett (2017) defined culture as follows:

...abstract network shaping and connecting social roles, hierarchically structured knowledge domains and ranked values. Culture is dynamic, shifting, reinterpreted moment by moment. The roles, knowledge and values of culture are only found in the bodies and behaviors of its members. (p. 67)

People get to know different cultures through behaviors, and communication is the behavior which cannot be avoided. The so-called *ignored culture* fills the unstated part of communication, while the unstated part usually plays crucial roles in human interaction. In most cases, the misunderstanding happened because the speaker omits the information that is assumed to be

shared by the listener. Or a person with the different cultural background interprets the meaning of the target language by simply translating it into his own language.

Since culture needs to be detected through different behaviors in communications, as a typical ignored culture, the Chinese way of accepting people's offerings always make American learners confused. Different from people in the United States, Chinese people usually refuse in front of the offerings at first, but later, they accept with the insisted push from the giver. This behavior makes American students misunderstand that Chinese people are insincere when talking to people, or even fake in communication because their explicit "no" implicitly means "yes!" If American students accept their Chinese friends' gifts without any hesitation, Chinese speakers might feel uncomfortable and consider their American friends as being rude or impolite.

How can language learners respond to others' offerings? Or How should people respond to others' offerings? There is no right or wrong answer to those questions without specific culture and context. Different cultural backgrounds influence people's behavior even in the same context. Nevertheless, when we communicate using one language, it is better to follow the cultural "rules" appropriately. Any violations of the cultural rules will cause misunderstandings between interlocutors. In terms of language teaching, the implied speech act should be paid enough attention from both teachers and learners.

As Everett says, "We do not say what we mean, and we often do not mean what we say" (Everett, 2017, p. 259). This paper uses "How do native Chinese deal with giving and receiving?" as an example to show the implicit functions of refusals in Chinese language. By examining three conversations from two movies and one TV series, the paper shows how native Chinese speakers respond to people's offerings. Based on the analysis of those three conversations, I argue that accepting people's offerings with refusal actions is a typical behavioral culture among Chinese native speakers. Further, three excerpts from the *Book of Rites* (*Liji* 禮記) are referenced as the origin of this cultural value. Finally, I provide two pedagogical implications.

This study is expected to have three contributions to the research on culture and language pedagogy: 1) to shed light on the importance of contextualized *performance* in language teaching. 2) to demonstrate that it is the instructors' responsibility to highlight the cultural values and cultural themes that language learners do not ordinarily notice in language class, and 3) to remind people that the *repetitive* contextualized performances in different levels of learning are necessary and needed.

## Methodology

This is a qualitative research and will not use measurement or instrumentation. The Speech Acts theory (locutionary act, illocutionary act, and perlocutionary act) mentioned at the beginning of this paper will be used as the method of data analysis. The basic unit of analysis is a contextualized performance which includes a particular time, a place with specific roles and audience instead of just a sentence or a word of a conversation.

In this paper, three examples on Chinese people accepting offerings with refusals will be analyzed. Those examples are from the movie *Early Spring in February* (*Zaochun Eryue* 早春二月), *Strange Friends* (*Moshengde Pengyou* 陌生的朋友), and the TV series *Chun Cao* (*Chun Cao* 春草), respectively. The English translations of these conversations were translated by the author, under the guidance of Dr. Galal Walker from the department of East Asian Languages and Literatures, the Ohio State University.

There are two reasons for choosing examples from those three video materials. On the one hand, the Chinese language program that the author is currently working for uses those videos as teaching materials. Looking through them can help the author, as a language instructor and a researcher, in reflecting on current teaching and using these as teaching resources. On the other hand, those three video materials are in different time periods spanning from the 1960's to the 2000's. This indicates that accepting offerings with a refusal is a typical Chinese behavioral culture. Recognizing this can not only help language instructors think about how to introduce this behavioral culture to students, but also pedagogically remind us that contextualized performance is necessary and should be included in classroom teaching.

## Data Analysis

### *Acceptance with a Refusal in Early Spring in February*

The conversation in Table 1 is chosen from the movie *Early Spring in February* (*Zaochun Eryue* 早春二月). This movie was produced in 1963 based on Rou Shi's novel *February* (*Eryue* 二月). Set in early 1926, this story demonstrates Xiao Jianqiu, tired of leading a wanderer's life after his involvement in the May Fourth Movement (1919), coming to teach at a middle school in Hibiscus Town (*Furongzhen* 芙蓉镇) at the invitation of his friend Tao Mukan, principal of the school. Idealistic and romantic in temperament, Xiao is soon caught in an emotional dilemma in which he was attracted by a vibrant girl named Tao Lan while he also has compassion to a pitiful widow (Leung & Mao, 1998, p. i).

Table 1

*早春二月 Early Spring in February (1963) (34'09"-34'25")*

Roles	Chinese	Roles	English
陶母	哎呀，你怎么来了？	Mrs. Tao	Wow, what brings you here?
钱先生	伯母，这是家父从杭州带来的，就算我孝敬伯母的一点小意思吧。	Mr. Qian	Hi, Mrs. Tao, these are some things that my dad brought from Hangzhou. I'd like to share it with you to show my respect.
陶母	<u>不敢当，不敢当，你们留着自己吃吧。</u>	Mrs. Tao	<b><u>How do I deserve this? Why don't you save it for yourselves!</u></b>
钱先生	伯母，你千万不要见外！	Mr. Qian	Don't treat me as an outsider!
陶母	<u>那怎么好意思呢！</u>	Mrs. Tao	<b><u>Thank you very much! I will take it.</u></b>

The conversation happens under the following context:

Mr. Qian who has a crush on Tao Lan takes some gifts on a visit to Tao Lan's family. However, Tao Lan was not available at that time as she went to Xiao Jiaoqiu's place to return a book. Tao's mother has a chat with Mr. Qian...

In this conversation, Mr. Qian is the person who gives the gift, and Tao Lan's mother is the receiver. When Mr. Qian is giving the gift, Tao's mother, instead of accepting it right away, refuses first by saying “不敢当，不敢当，你们留着自己吃吧。 *Bu gandang, bu gandang, nimen liu zhe ziji chi ba.*” (How do I deserve it? Why don't you save it for yourselves!). Hearing this, Mr. Qian, instead of taking it back, pushes more by saying “你千万不要见外！ *Ni qianwan bu yao jianwai!*” (Don't treat me as an outsider!). Being pushed, Tao's mother accepts the gift, but instead of directly saying “Thank you,” she accepts by saying “那怎么好意思呢！ *Na senme hao yisi ne!*” (Thank you very much! I will take it.), which still indicates a hesitance in accepting the snacks, showing her concern to Mr. Qian as the older generation.

As we mentioned earlier, the locutionary act is the speaking itself. The illocutionary act is the effect the person intends their speaking to have. The perlocutionary act is the consequential effect. There are two refusals from Mrs. Tao in this conversation. In terms of locutionary act, the refusal literally means “No, I cannot accept it,” but the illocutionary act is to show the humility. As a gift giver, seeing the polite refusal, Mr. Qian keeps pushing the snacks to Mrs. Tao, and makes her accept at last, which fits the perlocutionary act. Mr. Qian initially intends to please Tao Lan, but since she was not available at that time, he sends those snacks to Tao's mother so that Tao Lan will know his affection after coming back. Mrs. Tao's refusals function as a considerate and humbled way in accepting Mr. Qian's offerings. If Mr. Qian retreated and took those snacks back, that would violate the perlocutionary act, and the whole performance would turn out to be a different story.

### ***Acceptance with a Refusal in Strange Friends***

The conversation in Table 2 is chosen from the movie *Strange Friends* (*Moshengde Pengyou* 陌生的朋友), which was produced in 1983. This movie is a story about Zhang Tongsheng, an outstanding young worker on his business trip from Beijing to Fuzhou, trying his best to help a young girl who was framed by others and planning to suicide.

The conversation happens under the following context:

On a train from Beijing to Fuzhou, Zhang Tongsheng and Du Qiu make friends. During their first meeting, Du Qiu offers Zhang Tongsheng a cigarette to show his friendliness...

Table 2

*陌生的朋友 Strange Friends (1983) (7'06"-7'16")*

Roles	Chinese	Roles	English
杜丘	来，抽支烟。	DU Qiu	Come, take a cigarette!
张同生	<u>哎，我这儿有。</u>	ZHANG Tongsheng	<u>It's okay, I have some.</u>
杜丘	哎，出门在外，见面就是朋友，拿着！	DU Qiu	Away from home, we are friends when we meet. Take it!
张同生	<u>哦（继续推杜秋的手表示拒绝），好，谢谢！</u>	ZHANG Tongsheng	<u>Oh, well (pushing Du's hand to show refusal),</u> okay, thanks! (I'll take one.)

Different from Tao's mother and Mr. Qian in Table 1, Zhang Tongsheng and Du Qiu are about the same age, but they did not know each other before. For people who have not met before, offering cigarettes between males is a commonly seen behavior in showing friendliness at first meeting. Du Qiu, as a warm-hearted person who is a bit talkative and would like to make new friends on the train, offers Zhang Tongsheng a cigarette to keep their conversation going. The locutionary act here is simply about the cigarette.

Facing Du Qiu's offering, Zhang Tongsheng, as a polite young man who meets Du Qiu for the first time, refuses at the beginning by saying “哎，我这儿有。 *Ai, wo zher you.*” (It's okay, I have some.) as his locutionary act. At the same time, the illocutionary act is he shows his humility by refusing the stranger's offering. Du Qiu, instead of retreating, insists on offering the cigarette with the excuse “哎，出门在外，见面就是朋友。 *Ai, chu men zai wai, jianmian jiushi pengyou.*” (Away from home, we are friends when we meet.), showing his sincerity as the illocutionary act.

Zhang Tongsheng at last accepts the cigarette by saying “哦，好，谢谢！ *O, hao, xiexie!*” (Well, okay, thanks!) In the movie, although Zhang Tongsheng accepts Du Qiu's cigarette, we can see that he pushes Du Qiu's hand back again a little bit before saying “thank you” as his second refusal. Du Qiu, facing Zhang's second refusal, pushes his hand forward to make Zhang Tongsheng accept his gift as his friendliness. This performance ends up with the perlocutionary act that Zhang Tongsheng accepts Du Qiu's offering politely after refusing twice, and Du Qiu is happy about having a new companion and setting up a new friendship on a business trip by offering the cigarette.

### ***Acceptance with a Refusal in Chun Cao***

The conversation in Table 3 is chosen from the TV series *Chun Cao* (Episode 32). *Chun Cao* (春草), or “Spring Grass,” is a story describing the efforts of a young woman to escape her village, away from traditional familial relationships and rural life. The novel (2004) was turned into a television serial named *Chun Cao* (春草) in 2008, which has been popularized across the mainland of China.

The conversation happens in the following context:

Chuncao visits Mr. Lou, her teacher in elementary school, during the Spring Festival.



Thanks to Mr. Lou's timely and generous help, Chuncao can stay and work in the big city with her two children, Wanwan and Yuanyuan. In order to show her sincere appreciation, Chuncao goes to Mr. Lou's place with newly bought New Year's gifts, wanting to say "Happy New Year" to him and his family.

Table 3

春草 *Chun Cao* (2008, Episode 32) (16'50"-17'22")

Roles	Chinese	Roles	English
春草	还有这个!	Chuncao	This is for you!
娄大哥	<u>诶, 拿什么东西啊?</u>	Mr. Lou	What are you bringing?
春草	专门给你们买的。	Chuncao	I bought this especially for you.
娄大哥	<u>留给孩子吃啊!</u>	Mr. Lou	Save them for your children!
春草	专门给你们买的!	Chuncao	I bought this especially for you guys!
娄太太	我给你讲, 春草, 家里什么都有, <u>你拿回去给孩子吃</u> , 好不好?	Mrs. Lou	I'm telling you Chuncao, we have everything at home! Take these back for your children to eat, okay?
春草	我知道, 这是我们的心意!	Chuncao	I know, this is a small token of my affection!
万万	妈妈过年前就买了。	Wanwan	Mom bought them before New Year's.
春草	就是啊!	Chuncao	That's right.
娄太太	(从包里拿出来两个红包给孩子) 来, 一人一个, 春节快乐!	Mrs. Lou	(takes red envelopes from her purse and gives them to the children) Come on, one for each. Happy Spring Festival!
孩子们	<u>不要不要。</u>	Children	No no, we cannot accept this.
春草	<u>这不行, 这不行, 这不能拿。</u>	Chuncao	No no no, they should not take this.
娄大哥	诶, 一定拿着啊。你们要不要, 那叔叔, 也不要了。	Mr. Lou	Take it. Otherwise, I'm not going to take yours either.
娄太太	听到了没有? 拿着, 快, 一人一个!	Mrs. Lou	Come on, quickly, take it!
孩子们	谢谢阿姨.....	Children	Thank you, auntie...
春草	<u>真不好意思啊。</u>	Chuncao	This is so embarrassing.

This conversation covers two offerings.

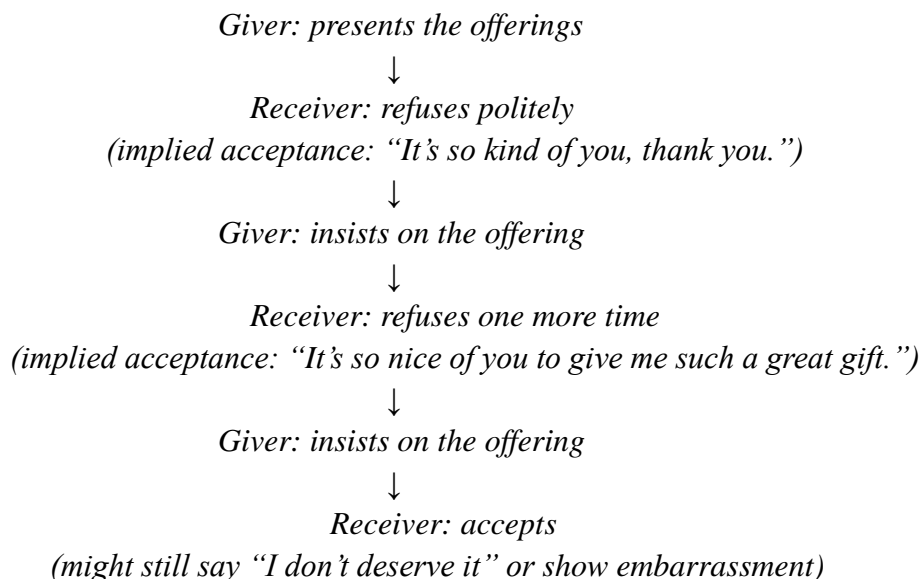
The first one is Chuncao sends New Year's gifts to Mr. Lou. Mr. Lou refuses this offering by asking a rhetorical question “拿什么东西啊? *Na shenme dongxi a?*” (What are you bringing?) to friendly complain that Chuncao did too much by buying those gifts. When Chuncao pushes back by saying “专门给你们买的。 *Zhuanmen gei nimen mai de.*” (I bought this especially for you guys!), Mr. and Mrs. Lou keep refusing by suggesting saving them for the children (留给孩子吃啊! *Liu gei haizi chi a!*). When Chuncao says “还有这个! *Hai you zhege!*” (This is for you!) as her first locutionary act to present the gift, her illocutionary act is to show her appreciation to Mr. Lou and his family. By pushing Mr. Lou to accept her gifts, she hopes they can accept her appreciation as the perlocutionary act, which makes her feel good.

The second act is when Mrs. Lou gives the red envelope to Chuncao's children. The initial reaction that Chuncao's children do is waving their hands, shaking their heads, and saying “不要不要。 *Bu yao, bu yao.*” (No, no, we cannot accept this.). Chuncao also refuses by saying “这不行，这不行，这不能拿。 *Zhe bu xing, zhe bu xing, zhe bu neng na.*”(No no no, they should not take this.). They did so because it will be embarrassing for her to accept offerings from Mr. Lou while giving away her gifts. By saying “No no no,” Chuncao's illocutionary act is to show her politeness. Facing these two refusals, Mr. Lou and his wife push back twice without any hesitation. When those two children accept the red envelope by saying “谢谢阿姨 *Xiexie ayi*” (Thank you, auntie...), neither of them looks happy. In addition, their tones sound as if they did something wrong. Chuncao, at the end, seeing she cannot refuse the red envelope, has to allow her children to accept it with an apology “真不好意思啊。 *Zhen bu hao yisi a.*” (“This is so embarrassing.” indicating “I'm so sorry to accept it.”).

The perlocutionary act in this conversation is both Chuncao and Mr. Lou accepting each other's new year's gifts. Both Chuncao and Mr. Lou show their appreciation to each other in this conversation, but neither of them uses the word “谢谢 *Xiexie*” (Thank you). Mr. Lou shows his concern to Chuncao by fussing over her buying the things that she shouldn't and “blames” Chuncao for not saving those good things for herself, while Chuncao accepts Mrs. Lou's red envelopes by apologizing and showing regret.

### ***Summary of the Three Conversations***

From the above three conversations, we observe that no matter in which time period (1960's, 1980's and 2000's), native Chinese speakers usually accept friends' or other people's offerings along with refusal actions. However, the refusal is by no means “No, I don't want it.”, but “Thank you for your kindness.” It is also a sign to make the gift giver insist on offering. The whole process might have at least three exchanges:



The excuses that are used for receivers in refusing the offering can be either talking about his own situation such as “I have enough” or “I have my own” or showing concern to the giver by saying “You should save it for your own” or “leave them for your children.”

Why do Chinese people accept offerings with the refusal action? Is it okay for Chinese people to directly accept a gift without refusing? To know the answer to these questions, we need to talk about Chinese cultural values and cultural themes.

## Cultural Values & Cultural Themes

Cultural values are the core principles or ideals existing throughout an entire community and leading the whole group's development. They function as the criteria in guiding people's actions in their daily lives. To show cultural values, people have specific actions or deeds in different contexts which can be conventionalized as time goes by, and people might get used to those actions without even thinking about why they do it. That is what we call these cultural themes. (Meng, 2012)

According to Chinese tradition, showing modesty and respect to each other is a typical cultural value throughout Chinese history, and accepting offerings with a refusal action is the cultural theme to show this cultural value. The origin of this cultural value can be traced all the way back to *The Book of Rites* (*Liji*; 禮記) in the Han (漢) dynasty.

### 曲禮上 *Summary of the Rules of Propriety Part 1*

The following excerpt chosen from the *Summary of the Rules of Propriety* talks about accepting with refusal actions.

凡與客入者，每門讓於客。客至於寢門，則主人請入為席，然後出迎客。  
客固辭，主人肅客而入。

Whenever (a host has received and) is entering with a guest, at every door he should give place to him. When the guest arrives at the innermost door (or that leading to the feast-room), the host will ask to be allowed to enter first and arrange the mats. Having done this, he will come out to receive the guest, who will refuse firmly (to enter first). The host having made a low bow to him, they will enter (together).

(<https://ctext.org/liji/qu-li-i/zhs?en=on>)

In the *Summary of the Rules of Propriety Part 1* of the *Book of Rites*, instead of walking with the guest together, the host needs to stop and to give extra space to the guest when passing every door. When arriving at the innermost door, the guest needs to refuse to enter to avoid disturbing anyone and to show respect. The host needs to bow to the guest as a last sincere invitation before the guest finally enters the room.

Guests and hosts are not only being mutually polite and respectful before entering the room,

but also keep refusing and accepting back and forth during the gathering. See the following example.

### **投壺 *The Game of Pitch-Pot***

The following excerpt chosen from the *Game of Pitch-Pot* talks about how the guest shows respect and politeness when facing the host's invitation to join a game in a feast.

主人請曰：“某有枉矢哨壺，請以樂賓。”賓曰：“子有旨酒嘉肴，某既賜矣，又重以樂，敢辭。”主人曰：“枉矢哨壺，不足辭也，敢以請。”賓曰：“某既賜矣，又重以樂，敢固辭。”主人曰：“枉矢哨壺，不足辭也，敢固以請。”賓曰：“某固辭不得命，敢不敬從？”

The host entreats (one of the guests), saying, ‘I have here these crooked arrows, and this pot with its wry mouth; but we beg you to amuse yourself with them.’ The guest says, ‘I have partaken, Sir, of your excellent drink and admirable viands; allow me to decline this further proposal for my pleasure.’ The host rejoins, ‘It is not worth the while for you to decline these poor arrows and pot; let me earnestly beg you to try them.’ The guest repeats his refusal, saying, ‘I have partaken (of your entertainment), and you would still further have me enjoy myself; --I venture firmly to decline.’ The host again says, ‘It is not worth the while for you to decline these poor arrows and pot; let me earnestly beg you to try them,’ and then the guest says, ‘I have firmly declined what you request, but you will not allow me to refuse; --I venture respectfully to obey you.’

(<https://ctext.org/liji/qu-li-i/zhs?en=on>)

In the *Game of Pitch-Pot*, the host invites the guest to have an entertainment by pitching the arrows into the pot. Without accepting the invitation, the guest needs to show respect and politeness first. So, he refuses twice by saying “I have gained a lot from you today.” The host, without retreating, insists on inviting for the third time, and then the guest accepts.

### **鄉飲酒義 *The Meaning of the Drinking Festivity in the Districts***

The following excerpt chosen from *The Meaning of the Drinking Festivity in the Districts* describes how the host and the guest show respect and humility to each other.

主人拜迎賓於庠門之外，入，三揖而後至階，三讓而後升，所以致尊讓也。

The president on the occasion bows to the (coming) guest as he receives him outside the college gate. They enter and thrice salute each other till they come to the steps. There each thrice yields the precedence to the other, and then they ascend. In this way they carry to the utmost their mutual demonstrations of honor and humility.

(<https://ctext.org/liji/xiang-yin-jiu-yi/zhs?en=on>)

In *The Meaning of the Drinking Festivity in the Districts*, the host and guest greet each other three times, followed by refusing to go first three more times to show the mutual demonstrations of honor and humility.

### ***Summary of Three Excerpts in the Book of Rites***

All three excerpts demonstrate how guests are to deal with the host's offerings. There is no exception that they all refuse first, and even keep refusing two or three times before accepting. There is no exception for the host either, insisting on making offerings to the guest without retreating. The refusal action does not literally mean "no" but implies "modesty" and "respect" to the person who offers, and it implicitly functions as a humbled acceptance.

Since Chinese people are so inculcated by this behavioral culture, it is not surprising to see that nowadays, when receiving people's offerings, they make the refusal to show the implied "yes, thank you" as a more humbled and respectful way.

When communicating with native Chinese people, knowing of a locutionary act is by no means enough. With the ignorance of the illocutionary act, the expected perlocutionary act is hard to achieve. In terms of accepting with refusals, it is by no means that Chinese people are insincere or fake, but exactly the other way around.

Walker (2017) argues that:

如果学汉语的美国人想按照说英语的方式来说汉语，他们当然可以学会汉语，因为选择汉语的美国人一般都很具有语言天赋。然而，经过五到七年的艰苦学习，他们获得的只是开口就得罪 13 亿中国人的能力。

If American students want to speak Chinese in an American way, they will be able to speak Chinese, because people who choose to learn Chinese are talented in language. However, after 5 to 7 years of hard work, what they finally get is the ability to offend 1.3 billion Chinese people once they start to talk. (Walker's speech, cited in Qin, 2017, p. 169)

This argumentation stands out as the function of illocutionary acts, or the *ignored culture* that people did not pay enough attention to. To have a more effective teaching and learning, some pedagogical implications need to be discussed.

## **Pedagogical Implications**

In terms of teaching Chinese as a foreign language, accepting with a refusal can be considered as an *ignored culture* (Walker, 2010) and is barely seen explained in textbooks or in other teaching materials. Without knowing this cultural manner, American learners might feel at a loss if they are refused by their Chinese friends for the first time when they are sending a gift to them, or they might be considered rude when accepting the gift without any refusals.

Here I provide two pedagogical implications.

### ***Key Notes in Dealing with People's Offerings***

It is necessary for language instructors to let students know that when receiving something from people or giving gifts, there are some implicit rules that Chinese people follow.

First, remember to hesitate! When accepting the gift, instead of accepting it immediately, Chinese people prefer to refuse it at the beginning to show respect to the gift giver. In many cases, they don't say “谢谢 *Xiexie*” (Thank you) at first because it indicates “accept” in English. A thoughtful and polite way of acknowledging the giver is showing your concern. People will express themselves by saying “留着自己用/吃 *liuzhe ziji yong/chī*” (save it for your own), or “你买这个干什么?” (you should not buy this for me), or “真是乱花钱 *zhen shi luan hua qian*” (you really are wasting the money) and so forth as the illocutionary acts that they are caring and sorry about the “benefit loss” to a friend.

Second, remember to insist! As the gift giver, seeing the receiver's refusal, an appropriate reaction is to insist on giving the gift for one or two more rounds. That is how a giver's sincerity and politeness are shown.

Third, remember reciprocity! It is not mandatory for the gift receiver to give a gift in return, or send something back right away, but making reciprocity happen indicates the gift receiver's thoughtfulness and that they cherish this friendship or other relations. We also need to note that when our friends give something back as reciprocity, *refusal* should not be avoided. Taking the “repay” right away indicates that the receiver is waiting for and expecting it, which might make the givers embarrassed as if they should do it.

### ***Jumping Out of the Knowledge Illusion by Contextualized Performances***

Sloman and Fernbach (2017) use the term “the curse of knowledge” (p. 128) to highlight the cognition problems wherein people tend to think that what is in their heads is in the heads of others. In the knowledge illusion, people tend to think what is in others' heads is in their heads. In both cases, we fail to discern who knows what.

In terms of language teaching, being native speakers, we are so familiar with the conventionalized behavior, and we assume learners should know this as well, which is a knowledge illusion. Native Chinese speakers are born with this cultural value along with the cultural theme and perform it so naturally without actively learning it. On the contrary, non-native learners are not born with this cognition. They only learned syntactic patterns to show specific meanings during communication. Given the ignorance of the learners' different background, if we do not introduce this cultural value to them, they will never know how to act and react with Chinese people's offering in a culturally appropriate way. Moreover, they might also misbehave in giving gifts or offering other stuff to native Chinese speakers.

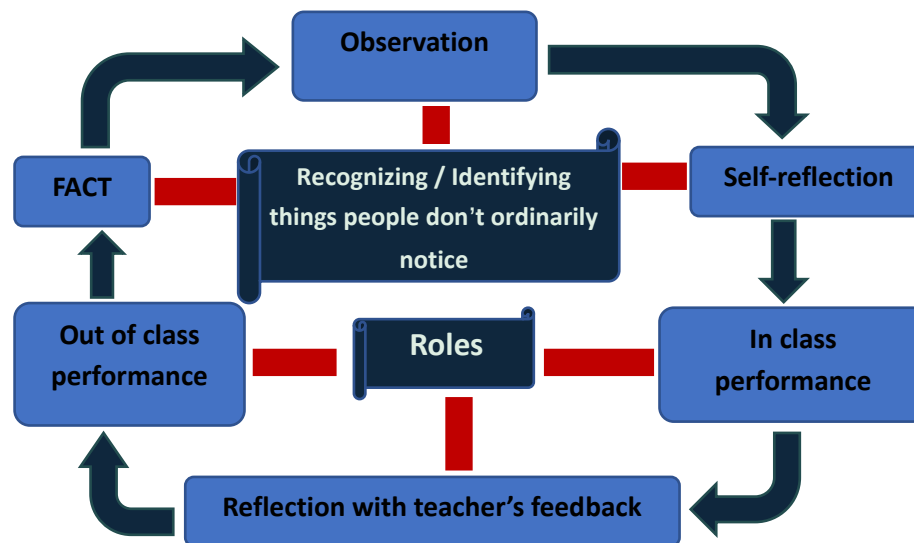
It is the instructor's responsibility to make the implicit function of refusal explicit to learners and highlight this ignored culture in classroom activities. Knowing the cultural value is important in learning a foreign language, but *knowing* is not *doing*. To help learners to do things in that target language, we also need to introduce the cultural theme through contextualized performances in class.

The *performance*, as is mentioned earlier in this paper, is viewed as a communicative event

situated in a particular time and place with specific roles for all participants who influence the event (Walker & Noda, 2010). When introducing the behavioral culture to students, it is necessary to set up specific context and create different situations and roles for them to perform so that they can have concrete learning experiences.

Figure 1 shows how we apply the cultural value and cultural theme into the process of learning.

*Figure 1*  
Different Focuses in Learning Process



Learning starts with observation and concrete experience (Kolb, 1984). Before learners really get to know how to do things in the target culture, we present videos, audio recordings, and texts for them to observe. Learners need to think about the context and what verbal and non-verbal behaviors are culturally appropriate in that context as a self-reflection. In class, we give students the same or similar context, and let them perform based on what they observed and self-reflected. Along with their performances, teachers give them feedback which makes students have a second experience with self-reflection. When learners communicate with native speakers in the target language one day out of class, they should be aware of their behaviors when encountering the similar context. After they have an amount of exposure to the implicit function of refusal and experience with how to deal with people's offering in a culturally appropriate way, the teacher introduces this behavior culture in class as a language fact, and in this way, students can have a deeper understanding of why and how to do it.

During the steps of "observation," "self-reflection," and "fact," we hope to guide students to recognize the behavior that they do not ordinarily perform in their own culture in communication. Furthermore, in the process of those three steps, teachers need to have the awareness that the behaviors that have been taken for granted by native speakers are totally strange to learners. Making those ignored behaviors explicit to students through contextualized performances in class is the language instructors' responsibility.

During the steps of “in class performance,” “out of class performance,” and the “reflection with teacher’s feedback,” we facilitate learners to have a clearer understanding on the behaviors of different *roles* in specific contexts. When their role changes in different situations, learners should be able to adjust their behaviors accordingly. Whenever their behaviors are not appropriate, instructors will give timely feedback as a reminder and guidance.

The arrows make this figure form a *repetitive* cycle, which means the performances need to be repeated so that learners’ experiences will be accumulated gradually. As Christensen and Warnick (2006) argue, people cannot learn things only after a one-time exposure. Even the native culture insists on native speakers understanding ways of expression through repeated experiences as they grow up. In that case, it is even more important for teachers to create more opportunities for students to practice the use of the target language in class time. By repetitive performances in class, students will get used to the situations and be familiar with the behavior and dialogue on both sides during the communication. By setting up different context and situations, teachers help students to build a repertoire that will enable them to negotiate interactions in the target culture on their own when they are in real situation. When the performances are repeated, instructors can adjust the context by changing the roles, place, audience, or time of the event to let learners adjust their script while performing.

Repetition is needed not only in one class, or one semester, but also in different time periods in learning process as a sustainable development. As with what has been demonstrated above, the three conversations are chosen from different levels. *Strange Friends* (*Moshengde Pengyou* 陌生的朋友) is the movie that learners access at the novice level, *Early Spring in February* (*Zaochun Eryue* 早春二月) is for the intermediate level, and *Chun Cao* (*Chun Cao* 春草) is used in advanced level classes. By repeating the cultural value and cultural theme in different levels of learning, students’ culture awareness will be cultivated and be strengthened, which will make the teaching and learning more effective.

## Curtain Call

In this study, I discussed how Chinese people deal with each other’s offerings, showing politeness and respect. By analyzing three short, contextualized conversations from the movies *Early Spring in February* (*Zaochun Eryue* 早春二月), *Strange Friends* (*Moshengde Pengyou* 陌生的朋友), and the TV series *Chun Cao* (*Chun Cao* 春草), respectively, I argued that Chinese people accept people’s offerings with a refusal while the refusal does not mean “No, I don’t want it,” but “Thank you, I’ll humbly take it.” By recalling three excerpts from *The Book of Rites* (*Liji* 禮記), I examined the origin of this cultural value and cultural theme. Further, it proves that accepting people’s offerings with refusals is not a newborn phenomenon, but a conventional behavior which is typical of Chinese cultural values and cultural themes. Finally, I provided two pedagogical implications. The first one is the keynotes of introducing dealing with people’s offerings in a Chinese way, which are “remember to be hesitant as a receiver,” “remember to insist as a giver,” and “remember reciprocity.” The second one argued that it is the instructors’



responsibility to highlight the verbal and non-verbal behaviors that people do not ordinarily notice in language class. To make it explicit, the contextualized performances are necessary. In addition, the repetitive practices at different levels of learning are also required.

There is more than one implicit function of Chinese language, and the implied meaning of “refusal” is just one of them. Hopefully, a teaching module and a curriculum can be designed regarding the implicit functions of Chinese language in future classroom teaching and research.

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